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Boy Soprano · *Nance Van Winckel*

If I keep my eyes on their window
the saints who've saved me before
might save me again. If I let the voice
come up, it moves my head to one side
and folds its long hand
into my own two small ones.

Spun from glass and an early angle
of sunlight, blue robes make the men
holy, make them saints forever.

Sometimes when I open my hands
the singing does two things at once:
it leaves me and it stays behind.
It goes out, and with its bony fingers,
touches shoulders and hats in the aisles.

Then it's not like the dark lonely thing
that leaves me and stays in the night,
sometimes leading me so far, I wake
uncertain of the way back, unsure from what
I've been separated for good.

I sit up and open my mouth.
I have to be sure. I start the song,
and there it is to finish itself.

It wakes my brothers down the hall.
Their lights come snapping on
and they appear, round my bed—
me with the voice pumping its good
Welch hymn, and the little ones
rubbing their eyes, sung loose
from one dream to another.

I fold my hands tighter
and take the song higher.
I let my robes fall back,
fall away, until I am myself uncovered,
the befuddled infant, the fourteen years
that add up to nothing.

How long can it last?
I ask everyone. If I dare
to think of a certain girl's hand
on my shoulder, and then
my shoulder laid bare, will
something begin to break?

No one answers, except to say
it *will* break, and it will leave me.
And I'm just to go on
as if what must happen
means no more than an old window
falling in, so many blue and holy eyes
cast down, shattered.